



The 2010 State of the County Address
by
Harford County Executive
David R. Craig

Harford County Council Chamber
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"My experience in government is that when things are non-controversial, beautiful, coordinated.....it may be that there isn't much going on."

John F. Kennedy could have been talking about Harford County in 2009 when he made that statement 50 years ago.

We faced many challenges last year. And, I thank you Council President Boniface and members of the County Council for this opportunity to review those challenges and how we rose to meet them.

But before I go too far I want to pause to remember a colleague who was here the first four times I have addressed the council, but who tonight - is with us in spirit.

Councilwoman "Roni" Chenowith lost her battle with cancer last year. We all admired her strength and dedication. There was not stronger advocate for our libraries, for our schools, for our parks, for our children.

We continue to miss her.

The last twelve months have also seen us lose two people who made an indelible mark on our county government - former Council Presidents Joanne Parrott and John Hardwicke.

Many things which we today take for granted we owe to their leadership.

The successes which we achieved in 2009 were wide-spread and diverse. Pete Gutwald and his staff in Planning and Zoning led us through Comprehensive Rezoning and for the first time in memory there was not a veto and no referendum - setting the stage for controlled growth for our future.

We can proudly acclaim the work of Ernie Crist and our 911 staff in making Harford County the first jurisdiction in North American to gain triple accreditation in Emergency Medical, Emergency Fire, and Emergency Police Dispatch protocols.

This year we will say “Good Bye” to Joe Pfaff as Director of Parks and Recreation. But one of the highlights in that department was the opening of the Cedar Home Facility - 14 fields that brought over 15,000 visitors to Harford County. Thank you Joe, we will miss you.

Many of our departments improved their efficiency and access to citizens. Under Richard Lynch DILP expanded its on-line permit program making it easier for citizens to apply.

Human Resources under Scott Gibson expanded usage to E-Archiving reducing reliance on papers as well as on-line applications. We also became the first jurisdiction to use E-verify for background checks. Mr. Gibson also aggressively worked on health care benefits to save money on administration without cutting services.

Our treasurer John Scotten and his staff created a new program which allows citizens to access tax records on-line.

Many of these IT innovations have come about as a result of the efforts of our new IT Chief, Justus Eapen. I can assure there is more to come under his leadership.

One of our biggest departments is Public Works. Major Accomplishments from DPW will ensure that we have the infrastructure needed for the future.

The Aberdeen Water Agreement will enable the City of Aberdeen to supply water to BRAC contractors for the short and mid-term. The construction of our own Abingdon Water Treatment Plant will fulfill our needs well into the next decade.

Meanwhile, we continue to be #1 in recycling and to move forward on a new waste-to-energy facility. Thank you, Bob, Joel, Hudson, Tom, and Jackie.

DPW is preparing the infrastructure, but the Office of Economic Development continues to lead the State in preparing not only Harford County, but all of Maryland, for BRAC. Jim Richardson, Denise Carnaggio and the entire staff of the Office of Economic Development can proudly state that we have successfully completed all the County actions in our BRAC Action Plan created in 2006. Well ahead of schedule.

With 4000 more jobs scheduled to arrive here in 2010 we can look back and see how important our capital budget commitment since 2005 has been.

Often the Law Department is overlooked when it comes to actions which promote economic growth but both Rob McCord and Nancy Giorno played major roles in two important aspects of BRAC. The PILOT agreement, which was adopted in June - the first in the state – and the Picerne agreement which guarantees adequate housing for military personnel, are key parts of the positive actions taking place on Aberdeen Proving Ground.

The original economy of Harford County was based on agriculture and we can look with pride on the office of the Chief of Staff under Aaron Tomarchio and the Division of Agriculture for the aggressive “Buy Local Program” which expanded in 2009.

Three of our departments have continued to work to protect our most vulnerable neighbors. Shawn Kingston and the Housing Department helped prevent 114 foreclosures.

Mary Chance and the Department of Community Services continues to extend help to senior citizens and Rockie Lynch and the Office of Government and Community Relations connects citizen with the proper department to resolve service issues

Debbie Henderson and her staff in the Procurement Department led the way in having a better control of our fleet as well as saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in energy costs.

No issue offered more challenges than the budget. Under the direction of Lorraine Costello and the Budget Office Chief, Kim Spence Harford County saw an unprecedented decrease in the size of the budget – both operating and capital. Most of those challenges will continue through the year.

A key element in successfully balancing the budget was our employees and the unions which represent them. They faced furloughs. They faced layoffs. They faced changes in benefits. And they continue to provide high quality services to the people of Harford County.

And we should thank them all - whether they are teachers or deputies, whether they staff our libraries or our health office, whether they work on the third floor or in the field.

Our outside agencies have continued to provide stellar service. Under the leadership of Jesses Bane the Sheriff Office has pushed the crime rated down 10%

Under the leadership of Susan Kelly the Health Department has prepared us for seasonal and H1N1 flu.

Under Jim LaCalle Harford Community College continues to offer the lowest tuition rates in the state and offers one of the highest quality educations. We will miss Jim when he retires this year.

Whether it is the Silver Reader, the Rolling Reader, or the expanded Whiteford Branch, the Library system under Audra Caplan continues to be one of the best in the state - earning a 4 star rating from the National Library Journal this year.

We welcome our new Superintendent Dr. Robert Tomback. We opened the new Bel Air High school and broke ground for the Red Pump Elementary School, which along with redistricting will lower overcrowding in our schools and continue to drive down the need for portable classrooms.

All of these accomplishments were made while we lived within our means, lowered our tax cap and lowered our tax rate. And all were done with the close cooperation and tireless effort of the County Council under the leadership of Council President Boniface.

But while tonight is about reflecting on the State of the County in 2009, the reality is that we are faced with challenges of equal size for 2010. Our major challenge is maintaining a balance, not just a balance of revenue and expenditures, but a balance between our wants - our needs - and our ability to meet them.

Both the national and state budgets have been presented. The first has a \$1.6 trillion deficit and a \$1 trillion raise in taxes. The second is balanced on the chimera of \$2 billion in federal stimulus funds.

I can assure you that our budget will be truly balanced with no increase in the tax rate and be as close to the constant yield as we can estimate at this time. Department heads continue to look for efficiencies and economies.

The balance for which we must strive is a balance between the taxes we pay and the services which we provide. And, which considers the public employee who is in the middle.

To do this we must not be concerned just about the next election. We must be concerned about the next generation.

We must strive to keep the state of Harford County strong.

We must grow our tax base to lessen the burden on present citizens.

We must expand our job base not just through BRAC but in all aspects of the economy.

We must ensure that when we pass the Baton of leadership on to the next generation of leaders that we can do so with the pride.

Much like John Hardwicke and Joanne Parrott and Roni Chenoweth did for us.

Council President Boniface, Councilman Guthrie, Councilman Woods, Councilman McMahan, Councilman Slutzky, Councilman Shrodes, Councilwoman Lisanti...I personally thank each of you for your help, your leadership, your diligence in maintaining the strong state of Harford County.

“Patience and Perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.”

I believe that the words of John Quincy Adams are as true today as the were when he said them almost twenty decades ago. They are as relevant for Harford County now as they were for our nation then.

We will confront the challenge. We will persevere.